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COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION
Sixteenth session
9-24 May 1994

DRAFT REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its thirty-fourth session, the General Assembly decided to maintain the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, established under Assembly resolution 33/115 C of 18 December 1978, which would thereafter be known as the Committee on Information, and to increase its membership from 41 to 66. In its resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979, the Assembly requested the Committee on Information:

> "(a) To continue to examine United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, particularly during the past two decades, and of the imperatives of the establishment of the new international economic order and of a new world information and communication order;
>
> "(b) To evaluate and follow up the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;
>
> "(c) To promote the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information and to make recommendations thereon to the General Assembly;"

and requested the Committee and the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

2. At its thirty-fifth session, the General Assembly, in resolution 35/201 of 16 December 1980, expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee on Information, approved the report of the Committee and the recommendations of its Ad Hoc Working Group, 1/ reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in

Assembly resolution 34/182, and decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 66 to 67. The Committee agreed, at its organizational session in 1980, that the principle of geographical rotation would be applied to all the officers of the Committee and that they should be elected for two-year terms of office.

3. At its thirty-sixth to forty-fifth sessions, the General Assembly again expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee on Information, approved the reports of the Committee 2/ and its recommendations, and reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in resolution 34/182 (see General Assembly resolutions 36/149 B, 37/94 B, 38/82 B, 39/98 A, 40/164 A, 41/68 A, 42/162, 43/60, 44/50 and 45/76). At its forty-sixth session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee and adopted its consensus recommendations as contained in General Assembly resolutions 46/73 A and B. The Assembly further requested the Committee to report to the Assembly at its forty-seventh session.

4. At its thirty-ninth session, the General Assembly appointed two new members of the Committee, namely China and Mexico; at its forty-first session the Assembly appointed Malta as a new member of the Committee; at its forty-third session, Hungary, Ireland and Zimbabwe were appointed; and at its forty-fourth session, the Assembly appointed Nepal as a new member.

5. At its forty-fifth session, the Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 74 to 78 members, and appointed Czechoslovakia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jamaica and Uruguay as members of the Committee. The General Assembly also decided on the appointment of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic as a member of the Committee on Information, with immediate effect, to fill the vacancy left by the German Democratic Republic.

6. At its forty-sixth session, the Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 78 to 79 members and appointed Burkina Faso as a member of the Committee.

7. At its forty-seventh session, the Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 79 to 81 and appointed the Republic of Korea and Senegal as members of the Committee.

8. At its forty-eighth session, the Assembly decided on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 81 to 83 and appointed Gabon and Israel as members of the Committee.

9. The Committee is thus composed of the following Member States:

Algeria	Burkina Faso	Cuba
Argentina	Burundi	Cyprus
Bangladesh	Chile	Denmark
Belarus	China	Ecuador
Belgium	Colombia	Egypt
Benin	Congo	El Salvador
Brazil	Costa Rica	Ethiopia
Bulgaria	Côte d'Ivoire	Finland

France
Gabon
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Guinea
Guyana
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kenya
Lebanon
Malta
Mexico
Mongolia
Morocco
Nepal
Netherlands
Niger
Nigeria
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Republic of Korea
Romania
Russian Federation
Senegal
Singapore
Slovakia
Somalia
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Syrian Arab Republic
Togo
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United Republic of Tanzania
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela
Viet Nam
Yemen
Yugoslavia
Zaire
Zimbabwe

II. ORGANIZATIONAL QUESTIONS

A. Opening of the session

10. The organizational meeting of the sixteenth session of the Committee was held at United Nations Headquarters on 9 May 1994. Prior to the official opening of the session, a solemn meeting to commemorate World Press Freedom Day (3 May) was convened. The speakers were a Vice-President of the General Assembly on behalf of the President of the General Assembly; the Assistant Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for Communications, Information and Informatics; the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information; and the Acting Chairman of the Committee on Information. Following the statements, the meeting adjourned to the Meditation Room of the Public Lobby for a wreath-laying ceremony dedicated to those media professionals who had lost their lives in the line of duty. The President of the United Nations Correspondents' Association spoke on that occasion. Subsequently, the Acting Chairman and the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information made introductory statements at the substantive part of the meeting.

B. Appointment of new members

11. The Committee welcomed the representatives of Gabon and Israel as new members.

C. Election of officers

12. Upon the nomination of the representative of Congo, the Committee elected by acclamation Mr. Mamadou Serme (Burkina Faso), to serve as Vice-Chairman to complete an unexpired term of office in the Bureau. The officers of the Committee on Information for the period 1993-1994 are as follows:

Chairman: Mr. Mansoor Suhail (Pakistan)

Vice-Chairmen: Mr. Alejandro H. Nieto (Argentina)
Mr. Mamadou Serme (Burkina Faso)
Mr. Stanislaw Konik (Poland)

Rapporteur: Mr. Niall Holohan (Ireland)

D. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

13. At its organizational meeting, the Committee adopted, without objection, the following agenda and programme of work: 3/

1. Opening of the session.

2. Appointment of new members.

3. Election of officers.

4. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.

5. General debate and consideration of substantive questions:

   (a) Promotion of the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information;

   (b) Continuation of the examination of United Nations public information policies and activities in the light of the evolution of international relations, particularly during the past two decades, and of the imperatives of the establishment of the new international economic order and of a new world information and communication order;

   (c) Evaluation and follow-up of the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications.

6. Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session.

7. Other matters.

14. The sixteenth session of the Committee on Information, chaired by one of its Vice-Chairmen, Mr. Stanislaw Konik (Poland), continued with its substantive meetings at United Nations Headquarters from 9 to 24 May 1994. For consideration of item 5 of the agenda, the Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC), submitted pursuant to the request of the General Assembly in paragraph 6 of its resolution 46/73 B; 4/

(b) Report of the Secretary-General on the status of Development Forum, submitted pursuant to the request of the General Assembly in paragraph 5 of its resolution 48/44 B; 5/

(c) Report of the Secretary-General on the review of publications by the Department of Public Information, submitted pursuant to the request of the General Assembly in paragraph 6 of its resolution 48/44 B; 6/

(d) Report of the Secretary-General on the integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), submitted pursuant to the request of the General Assembly in paragraph 8 of its resolution 48/44 B; 7/

(e) Report of the Secretary-General on United Nations information centres in 1993: allocation of resources from the regular budget of the United Nations, submitted pursuant to the request of the General Assembly in paragraph 11 of resolution 48/44 B; 8/

(f) Report of the Secretary-General on the enhancing, reactivation and establishment of United Nations information centres, submitted pursuant to the request of the General Assembly in paragraph 13 of its resolution 48/44 B; 9/

(g) Report of the Secretary-General on observations and suggestions by Member States on ways and means of furthering the development of communication infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries, submitted pursuant to the request of the General Assembly in paragraph 20 of its resolution 48/44 B. 10/

E. Observers

15. The following Member States took part in the session as observers: Albania, Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Belize, Cameroon, Croatia, Czech Republic, Haiti, Honduras, Kazakhstan, Liberia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Monaco, Namibia, Nicaragua and Sweden. The representatives of the Holy See and Switzerland also participated as observers.

16. Representatives of UNESCO and the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) also attended.

F. Other matters

17. The Committee on Information decided to conduct further informal consultations through the Bureau, the spokespersons of the regional groups, the Group of 77 and China.

18. The Chairman informed the Committee that Belize, Croatia, the Czech Republic and Kazakhstan had requested to become members of the Committee.

III. GENERAL DEBATE AND CONSIDERATION OF SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS

19. Statements during the general debate were made by the following States members of the Committee: Algeria (on behalf of the Group of 77 developing countries), Argentina, Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Congo, Costa Rica, Cuba, Egypt, Ethiopia, Finland (on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States), Gabon, Greece (on behalf of the European Union), Guinea, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Israel, Japan, Jordan, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Ukraine and Uruguay. Statements were also made by the observers of Croatia, Kazakhstan and the Czech Republic.

20. In addressing the substantive questions before the Committee, all speakers pointed to the increasing challenges facing the world community in the closing years of the twentieth century. They were global in nature and required multilateral solutions and were, in turn, being reflected on the ever-lengthening agenda of the General Assembly. In the words of one delegation, speaking on behalf of a number of others, accurate and objective public information, addressing both the achievements of the United Nations and the problems it faced, were vital at a time when post-cold-war euphoria was giving way to a measure of doubt in the Organization's abilities to fulfil many mandates. A number of speakers said that they regarded the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations as a milestone in its history and a tremendous opportunity for a concerted public information campaign.

21. Delegations expressed their satisfaction that the current session reflected a consensus in the Committee, which they hoped would be maintained and strengthened. That was essential in order to help the United Nations, and the Department of Public Information, to meet the challenges ahead. They also welcomed recent measures and initiatives taken by the Department, as well as the continued stability of its operations. Many delegations felt that the informal briefing sessions before and during the session, as well as the regular meetings of the extended Bureau, provided a helpful and constructive tool to deal with issues of mutual concern.

22. Almost all delegations emphasized the power of information and its pivotal role in the world today, both as an instrument of social, cultural, political and economic change and as an instrument of peace, democracy and development. Many delegations expressed their commitment to a more balanced world information order, which would aim to eliminate the existing disparities between the developed and developing world in terms of modern technology and human resources

training, as well as to increase mutual understanding and promote peace and prosperity. Access to the free flow of information was a legitimate quest for all peoples, as was the right to convey their news "first-hand", which would ensure a diversity of information sources. A number of speakers were of the opinion that the peoples of the developing world were living in "media ghettos", locked out of participation in the modern communications revolution. The view was expressed by several delegations that the existing imbalances might become more acute unless the developing countries were assisted in overcoming the technical and financial difficulties that were a barrier to their development of communications infrastructures. Several speakers emphasized in this connection the importance of strengthening South-South cooperation.

23. All speakers agreed that freedom of information, which was, even now, being restricted in some countries according to several delegations, was the touchstone of all the freedoms and was intrinsically linked to the freedom of the press. They supported the ideals of World Press Freedom Day, and praised and paid tribute to those brave journalists and media professionals who had died in the line of duty. One speaker specifically noted the number of journalists killed in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. One delegation suggested that the United Nations should initiate the drafting of a legally binding instrument in order to protect journalists.

24. Many delegations expressed their support for continued United Nations cooperation with UNESCO and its International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). They remarked on the positive achievements of the seminars organized jointly by UNESCO and the Department of Public Information in Windhoek and Almaty and, most recently, in Santiago, Chile, which had been devoted to promoting an independent and pluralistic press in those regions. Several delegations said that they hoped that a similar seminar would be organized for the Arab region in 1995.

25. One delegation spoke out against what he regarded as the continuing violation of his country's sovereignty committed in the name of the free flow of information and alleged that the Charter of the United Nations and other international instruments were being violated by a number of radio stations and one television station broadcasting from another Member State. No single set of priorities should be imposed on a country from the outside.

26. In addressing the subject of the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, all speakers congratulated the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information on assuming his new functions as head of the Department of Public Information. They thanked him for his informative and thought-provoking introductory overview and expressed the confidence that his leadership would greatly benefit from his long years of experience. They all expressed their continued support for the work of the Department and their willingness to cooperate fully with him in the execution of his duties.

27. Speakers commented on the challenging and indispensable role of the Department as the focal point of the information activities of the Organization, which in turn necessitated the Department's coverage of the whole range of issues currently before the United Nations. They supported the focal-point approach, which they were convinced would sharpen the focus and polish the image

of the Organization, while eliminating duplication of effort. In addition, many delegations expressed the need for the Department to have flexibility in utilizing its resources and the need for constant re-evaluation of priorities in order to reflect the changes taking place in the world. Several speakers pointed to the new realities in the Middle East and South Africa. In that connection, a number of speakers welcomed the recent election in South Africa and congratulated the Department on its role in helping to bring about the end of the apartheid system. Several speakers said that the Department had greatly contributed to the process of decolonization over the years and some said it should now reallocate its resources to help with other African problems. One speaker said she hoped that DPI's information activities on the peace process in the Middle East would contribute to an atmosphere of peace and reconciliation, and another reaffirmed the importance of the Department's programmes and activities in promoting wider support and affecting public opinion in donor countries to further the cause of peace in the Middle East.

28. All speakers expressed their appreciation to the Department and its staff for all of the many information products it produced and activities it successfully engaged in despite a more restrictive budgetary environment. They asked that it continue to streamline its work to increase cost-effectiveness. Several delegations expressed the view that the Committee on Information must not over-burden the Department without giving thought to its resources. One delegation said that it was concerned about the budget cuts at a critical time in the life of the Organization and expressed its belief that the Department could not continue to bear the brunt of those cuts. One delegation, on behalf of a large group, said that the relationship of the Department and information components located elsewhere in the United Nations should be further clarified; perhaps what was needed was the consolidation within the Department of the funds allocated for information activities outside the Department in order to maximize effectiveness and eliminate duplication.

29. Several delegations commented on the ongoing restructuring of the Department, which they believed was being carried out in order to maximize effectiveness. Another delegation set out what were in his opinion the three major categories that Department's activities should fall into, namely "preventive, promotive and commemorative". In regard to the latter category, he expressed the hope that it would result in the younger generation's becoming more appreciative of the work of the Organization.

30. With regard to the subject of coverage of General Assembly-mandated activities, one speaker, on behalf of a number of others, remarked on the Department's increased coverage and promotion of United Nations activities of particular interest to developing countries. However, several others expressed the belief that sometimes those who most needed the United Nations were the least familiar with its work. At a time when the Secretary-General was preparing his "Agenda for Development", many speakers reiterated the need for intensified Department coverage of development and poverty issues. A number of speakers believed that excessive emphasis was being placed on peace-keeping work. There was a need to balance the work on the maintenance of international peace and security with that on development and other socio-economic issues.

31. However, all delegations agreed that the Department's range of information work on United Nations peace-keeping operations represented a monumental effort and was vital to the success of the many varied missions. Those activities were of the greatest significance for forming a positive world opinion, especially in the troop-contributing countries, and for informing the local public in the regions where the operations were being undertaken. Many delegations reiterated their belief that an information component should be built into any peace-keeping operation beginning at the planning stage. One speaker said that coordination between the Department of Public Information and the Department of Peace-keeping Operations was necessary in ensuring that information was individually tailored to each operation. One speaker said that he felt that the information delivered was better in some instances than in others, and used the example of the information disseminated on the operations of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia as having a positive effect. On the other hand, another delegation said a more effective United Nations information effort might for example have helped to prevent some of the misunderstandings that arose as a result of particular incidents in Somalia. All agreed that it was vital to impart to the international community a deep understanding of the exact mandate in each and every case, including an explanation of the United Nations limitations in order to prevent misconceptions and unwarranted criticism. One delegation said that the possession by the United Nations Protection Force of a suitable radio transmitter would be of considerable assistance in the improved dissemination of information on the situation in the former Yugoslavia. One speaker regretted that there seemed to have been relative silence in the South African media about the United Nations Observation Mission in South Africa, the largest electoral observer mission ever deployed by the United Nations, and thought there might perhaps be lessons to be learned from that.

32. All speakers expressed their support and appreciation for the Department's promotional work on the important upcoming conferences on development and social issues, including the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 5-13 September 1994), the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 4-15 September 1995). One speaker referred to the upcoming World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction in Yokohama, Japan, and said that an effective public information campaign had been a priority and would greatly contribute to its success. A number of delegations specifically commented on the usefulness of the Department's new Development Update, which contained important information on those conferences and the linkages between them. One country, on behalf of a number of others, congratulated the Department on its work on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and viewed it as a good example of what could be done. Another speaker said that his country believed it imperative for the Department to disseminate information on the HIV/AIDS epidemic. One delegation stressed that, in a world witnessing a multitude of terrible human tragedies, such as in Rwanda, it was perhaps the appropriate time for the Department to appoint a humanitarian focal point. Another delegation underscored the value of the journalists' encounters organized by the Department in areas where human rights were being violated. They represented a means by which journalists could view the situations first-hand and report the truth to the world. It was important to publicize the upcoming tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster and the environmental and ecological catastrophe resulting from it, according to another delegation.

33. In commenting on the report before the Committee on the Department's publications, all speakers expressed support and appreciation for the many publications, as well as their firm belief in the importance of that type of output. A number of delegations noted that 21 publications had been devoted to peace-keeping operations and other political missions. One delegation was grateful for the issuance of the Agenda for Peace in the Nepali language. One speaker, on behalf of a large group, said that in publications, as in all other outputs, development issues should be covered and more publications should be issued on economic and social matters before the Organization. Many regretted the demise of Development Forum and hoped an alternative would be found by JUNIC. Several speakers expressed their appreciation for Africa Recovery and said they would like to see more information on the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s. One speaker regretted that only one publication had been published in the Russian language, while another wanted to see more publications in Croatian. Another requested more information on the overall publications policy of the Department. Several speakers remarked that it was important in producing publications, as in all information products, not to compromise flexibility by devoting too much attention to static output, as well as to consider the logic of demand, not just supply. Another said that in his opinion there could be money saved by cutting some superfluous salutations and closing paragraphs in a number of documents.

34. The Department's effective use of modern technology in the dissemination of its products was generally applauded by most speakers. One, however, said that, while he was appreciative of on-line services provided to Permanent Missions, he believed that information could be made more user-friendly and be furnished faster. Another asked that more training be provided in the use of those services.

35. On the subject of the Department's audiovisual coverage of the activities of the United Nations, many delegations expressed their appreciation at the establishment of the United Nations Radio Bulletin Board, which they found very useful, and they supported its upgrading and expansion. One delegation was of the opinion that the Department's radio studios should have better quality transmission equipment. With regard to the television output of the Department, one delegation suggested that a monthly magazine for use by African television stations be considered. Another put forward the idea of co-productions of documentaries with outside sources.

36. A number of delegations addressed the importance of enhanced media relations. One delegation, on behalf of others, supported the recent efforts of the Department in shaping its partnership with media in member States, stressing the value of maintaining cooperative relations with the media at Headquarters. One speaker said that some press releases did not adequately reflect the speakers' words because of poor translations. Several stated that press releases must be issued on time in order to be useful. It was the job of the Department, in the words of one delegation, to provide balanced, accurate and timely information to "feed" the media and offer them guidance. Several speakers expressed the belief that the press briefings were indispensable to delegations and the world press.

37. All delegations stressed that the work of the United Nations information centres was of vital importance to the objectives and achievements of the Organization and to efforts of the Department at the grass-roots level and therefore deserved increased support. Some expressed the view that the operational capacities of those centres needed strengthening. The integration exercise was characterized by one speaker as perhaps the most important issue before the Committee, and it was the subject of lengthy debate. Many delegations commented positively on the "integration experience" in 16 centres, as mandated by the Secretary-General, and supported his intention to continue with it. They believed that the stated objectives of presenting a unified image in the field, enhancing information activities and achieving economies were being met, and that the concept was a sound one. On the other hand, a number of delegations thought that, although the exercise had been instituted for good reasons, any future steps should be taken only very cautiously. Many supported a case-by-case approach in agreement and consultation with the host Governments, believing that integration might be beneficial in some countries, but not in others. Many also expressed support for close cooperation with UNDP, which could result in improved information on development.

38. The appropriate allocation of resources among the Centres continued to be a very important element in their effective functioning, according to some delegations. Several noted that the economies achieved in the London Information Centre were a positive step and looked forward to continuing such an approach in field operations. Many delegations appealed to host countries to make premises available free of charge and stressed the important role of the financial support of those countries. New centres, said one speaker, should be considered in light of offers of that type of assistance.

39. Many delegations welcomed the actions taken by the Department to strengthen the system of information centres and resolve outstanding issues which involved enhancing, reactivating or establishing centres in Sana'a, Tehran, Bujumbura, Dar es Salaam and Dhaka. One speaker asked that that latter information centre be given a full complement of staff. As for the information centre in Tehran, another speaker said that through no fault of the host Government or the Department, the changes had ultimately not been fully implemented. One delegation deplored personnel cuts in information centres and, regarding the staffing of the Bujumbura centre, said his Government was awaiting a Director. One representative said that his country had made a building available for the centre, but needed a full-time Director in Brazzaville. In addition, he believed that, although integration showed numerous positive aspects, it should not apply to the centre located in his country. Two delegations welcomed the Assistant Secretary-General's efforts concerning the centre in Ouagadougou. Another representative said information centres were a primary research and information source and requested a centre in Libreville, the capital of his country. One speaker said the Lagos Information Centre should be upgraded, as it was an important regional and subregional centre. Another speaker reiterated his Government's request for a centre in Conakry. One representative said the post of Director in New Delhi, his country's capital, was vacant and hoped it would soon be filled.

40. Another speaker questioned why the University for Peace in her country was not being accepted as an information centre, since it was performing the task of

focal point for disseminating information. One delegation expressed its appreciation for the United Nations office in Kiev and its activities. Another said that the centre in Prague was one of the oldest and his Government was providing financial support and would be reporting on the details shortly.

41. One delegation said it supported the eventual establishment of a United Nations information centre in Israel, when budgetary and logistical considerations made it practicable and appropriate. One speaker said that now that there was a normalization of the situation in Lebanon, it was time to reappoint a Director for the centre in Beirut. Another asked that the Department continue its efforts to upgrade local assistants to the level of national information officers, and upgrade existing equipment as well.

42. On the subject of another important network of the Department, one delegation underscored the potential of the over 330 United Nations depository libraries located around the world and expressed his belief that they should be strengthened, as should the system for evaluating how the collections were being handled. He observed that there was significant room for improvement, and expressed his delegation's willingness to assist the Department in that endeavour.

43. One delegation noted that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were another effective channel for disseminating United Nations information at the grass-roots level. He thanked the Department for its work in that regard and expressed gratitude for its cooperation on the conference of NGOs of the Commonwealth of Independent States, to be held later in 1994. Another commented on the importance of United Nations guided tours as a means of reaching out to the public, and expressed regret at the curtailment of the tour route, which prevented people from viewing the exhibit on the horrors of atomic warfare.

44. At the close of the general debate, the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information expressed his appreciation for the kind words addressed to him and to the Department. He said that, since he assumed his functions, he had been encouraged by the new spirit of cooperation between the Committee and the Department. He stressed his intention to maintain a working dialogue beyond the current session and to contact each delegation participating in the debate to discuss points of individual concern. The Assistant Secretary-General took note of the favourable comments of delegations on the actions taken since his appointment to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources for operational activities among the information centres. He added that efforts would be made to ensure optimum use of the Department's scarce resources over the whole range of its activities.

45. In responding to a number of delegations who commended the Department's contribution to the eradication of apartheid, he took note of their reference to the resources available within the Department at the close of the campaign and said they needed to be reviewed. While he awaited the guidance of the General Assembly on the matter, there appeared to be a potential need for an information component in the new South Africa.

46. The Department was fully aware of the need to highlight economic and social development issues, which contributed to the conditions fundamental to peace and

reinforced the link between peace-keeping and the developmental aspects of post-conflict peace-building. In that regard, the Department would mobilize its efforts to publicize the issues contained in the Secretary-General's forthcoming Agenda for Development. The Department, in its new Development Update bulletins, was stressing the interrelationship of the issues under discussion in the 1994 and 1995 United Nations conferences on population and development, social development, women, natural disaster reduction and the development of small island countries. The Department was developing a major public information strategy for each conference, carefully planned to ensure that the mobilization of resources was timed for maximum impact. Those efforts would contribute to the overall information support for the United Nations Agenda for Development.

47. In publicizing these conferences and other United Nations issues, the Department considered the media as its partner. The Department was exploring ways of working more closely with the television media, and was helping to strengthen their United Nations-related programmes for mutual benefit by providing access to United Nations experts and appropriate materials and making arrangements for co-productions or redissemination of the United Nations own products. Through the efforts of certain information centres, regularly scheduled television programmes on the work of the United Nations had been established in a number of countries.

48. He welcomed the support of delegations for the Department's potential role in information activities on peace-keeping and reiterated his view that all peace-keeping information components should form an integral part of a well-defined United Nations information strategy. On the subject of humanitarian assistance issues, which were of concern to many delegations, he said that the Department maintained close liaison with the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, with a view to making the public better aware of the complementarity between the political, peace-keeping and humanitarian roles of the United Nations. He agreed that the suggestion for a focal point for humanitarian affairs was a good one, which would serve to strengthen the work of the section within the Department dealing with humanitarian activities.

49. On the subject of electronic communications, raised by a number of delegations, the Department had accelerated the introduction of the United Nations database with fast-processing capabilities and user-friendly interface for use by delegations, the media and the public, to be completed by the end of summer 1994. The Department databases were currently updated several times a day, contained in-depth information such as press releases, reports of the Secretary-General and Security Council resolutions, and were accessed by approximately 4,000 users daily. With regard to specific comments concerning the user-friendliness of the United Nations Bibliographic Information System (UNBIS), the Assistant Secretary-General agreed that UNBIS was a rather old system and, in fact, was one of the first large-scale database applications of the New York Computer Service mainframe computer. He noted that the Dag Hammarskjöld Library had plans to improve access to its files in two ways, through the issuance of UNBIS Plus on CD-ROM in the summer of 1994, and through acquiring modern integrated library management hardware and software, based on the latest technology.

50. He noted with appreciation the positive observations on the Department's radio service, especially the United Nations Radio Bulletin Board and said the system continued to function, at no cost to the Department, because it used the existing in-house voice mail and regular telephone system. He hoped that the Committee could provide the Department with the legislative flexibility to permit the upgrading and expansion of that system. Responding to the importance that delegations placed on radio programming, he hoped that the Committee would encourage Member States to provide additional facilities for airing a regular and timely schedule of United Nations radio programming.

51. In response to the debate on the subject of integration of United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices, he assured the Committee that the Department would move prudently on a case-by-case basis, while keeping the Committee fully informed. The Department would also ensure that integrated centres continued to fulfil their information mandates and that the process would proceed, where appropriate, in close consultation with Governments concerned. Responding to the requests of a number of delegations that had declared their interest in the establishment of a new United Nations information centre or information component, he pointed out that the role of the Committee as a whole was of crucial relevance, in that the Committee normally recommended General Assembly approval. However, he hoped that the Committee would agree with him that the Department was not in a position to comply with every request for new centres or components unless the General Assembly authorized the additional necessary resources. If new decisions were taken in that respect, the Department would, of course, make the financial implications known to the Committee.

52. He confirmed that the Department had initiated action to appoint directors in specific centres, yet he pointed out in response to questions concerning the posts of director at certain others, that, owing to the retrenchment exercise of 1989 and subsequent further cuts for United Nations information centre posts at the Professional level, there were no available posts to enable the Department to appoint full-time directors to those centres. However, the Department had provided staffing, equipment and training as necessary and the respective UNDP resident representatives, who served as acting directors of the centres, were providing full-time Professional supervision and were directly responsible to the Department. He supported the suggestion of one delegation to produce materials at the information centres as a way of saving on the costs of the materials and their distribution and believed it could apply to the production and wider dissemination of materials in both official and non-official languages.

53. With regard to a question on the University for Peace in Costa Rica, he said that it could not be designated as a United Nations information centre because the staff involved were not United Nations staff. However, the Department greatly appreciated the efforts of the personnel concerned.

54. He reminded delegations that the Publications Board had been recently revived and, in that connection, the Department would make every effort to ensure that publications were interesting and topical, that they reached a wide public and that they did not duplicate other materials available within the United Nations system. In response to a number of delegations that had made

reference to Development Forum, he said the Department would take the initiative to see that that matter would be given priority attention at the upcoming meeting of JUNIC in July.

55. In view of delegations' interest, he reiterated that Africa's economic recovery and development was a priority for the Department, especially in terms of its role in helping to achieve the continent's goals contained in the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s. African development concerns featured heavily in all the Department's print and audiovisual outputs and considerable success had been realized in having the international and African media reproduce its materials. Further, the most concrete expression of the Department's concern in that regard was the recent elevation of the Africa Recovery Unit to a Section, with the addition of a Professional post.

56. Regarding the concern of delegations on the recent restrictions placed on the guided tours at Headquarters, he said that, with the support of the Committee on Information, the Department would continue to seek the cooperation of all appropriate departments in making the guided tours a meaningful experience once again for all visitors.

57. He assured delegations that the Department would try to evaluate its mandates in an effort to avoid spreading its efforts too sparsely. The Department believed it might now be time for the international community to review the calendar of special observances, bearing in mind that increasing numbers could result in less impact for individual special events. He expressed the belief that the Department could operate more effectively with increased operational expenses, more flexibility in their application and greater human resources mobility. He viewed the present as an opportune time for the Department to demonstrate the genuine professionalism that existed within its ranks.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/35/21), annex, sect. V.

2/ Ibid., Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/36/21); ibid., Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/37/21 and Corr.1); ibid., Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/38/21 and Corr.1 and 2); ibid., Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/39/21); ibid., Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/40/21); ibid., Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/41/21); ibid., Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/42/21); ibid., Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/43/21); ibid., Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/44/21); ibid., Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/45/21); ibid., Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/46/21).

3/ A/AC.198/1994/1.

4/ A/AC.198/1994/2.

5/ A/AC.198/1994/3.

6/ A/AC.198/1994/4.

7/ A/AC.198/1994/5.

8/ A/AC.198/1994/6.

9/ A/AC.198/1994/7.

10/ A/AC.198/1994/8.